



RICHARD M. BILBY: ADVOCATE FOR OUR PROFESSION

by Richard H. Weare, District of Arizona

On August 11, 1998, clerks of court, deputy clerks, and the Federal Court Clerks Association lost a valuable friend, long-time supporter, and ardent advocate. Richard Mansfield Bilby was the youngest son of one of Arizona's pioneer families. Richard, as he preferred to be called by judges and deputy clerks alike, was a graduate of the University of Arizona and the University of Michigan Law School.

To say he was a man of contrasts is an understatement. Born to privilege, he was a staunch defender of the disenfranchised; a conservative Republican appointed by a Democratic president; a judicial officer who ran a tightly controlled courtroom but did not wear a robe; a humble, deferential, kind man who had no hesitation in calling things exactly as he saw them no matter who might be before him and harshest on those who held positions of power and public trust; and a traditionalist while at the same time one of the nation's most progressive and innovative judicial officers.

Both pragmatic and decisive, he almost single-handedly created the automation fund that brought the technology age to the federal judiciary. His political skills were instrumental in persuading then Congressman Jack Brooks, Chair of the House Appropriations Committee, to fund computer technology for the courts. In a profession where precedent is controlling, his innovative efforts in the area of jury reform are now emulated nationally.

In the often somber ranks of the federal judiciary he wore a Mickey Mouse watch, and once at a presentation made to clerks of court opened his remarks by spraying the first row of spectators with a water gun. He often said, "Being a judge is a job you take very seriously, but you should never take yourself too seriously." He lived that credo, and those of use who knew him and spent time with him can attest to that. He included several clerks and deputy clerks in his extended network of friends, and we benefitted from his friendship and grew to share his love for Arizona and the outdoors. The pictures accompanying this article attest to the zest for life that he shared with many of us including: Bob Heinemann, Bruce Rifkin, Dan Thomas, Jim Davey, Wally Furstenau, Lance Wilson, Norman Meyer, Cam Burke, Matthew Balch, Bob Conner, Ronnie Honey, Nancy Dougherty, Jack Wagner, John Greacen, Leonard Brosnan, Bill McCool and Pat Jacobs, among others.

He was a man of strong convictions and values, and he saw the work performed in our profession of court administration as important as that performed by the judicial officer. He once said, "Any court can get along with a mediocre judge, but no court can survive with a mediocre court administrator." He gave voice to his strong feelings on the importance of court administration any time he had an opportunity, and there were many during his tenure as chair of the Judicial Improvements Committee of the Judicial Conference of the United States. Few judges have taken as active a role as Richard Bilby in championing the role of clerks and clerk's offices as he did, and in doing so he advanced our case in a significant way.

While his legacy to the federal judiciary is well established, his legacy in our profession is still evolving, and it is our shared responsibility not to disappoint this fine man, great judge, and good friend to us all.